**June 2, 2019**

**Revelation 22:12-21**

In these final verses of scripture, we get a happily ever after. All that was evil and broken and not-from-God was destroyed; death, mourning, crying, pain are all gone. God made a new heaven and a new earth and a new Jerusalem: a beautiful, shining place where God Immanuel will live with us into eternity. Nations and people will stream through these gates because everyone will want to be with God. This diverse crowd will miraculously live in peace, shining with God’s glory.

But Revelation doesn’t *just* give us a happy ending. These last verses are an invitation to reinvest in scripture’s story. These verses call us back to the beginning. “I am the root…” Jesus said… A root anchors a plant to the ground, preventing it from blowing away and supporting its higher development. The root is the sustaining part of a plant; it filters *good* food and water from the dirt and darkness. The root then sends this food to different parts of the plant, promoting growth and expansion.

So if Jesus is the root, we remember how he, the eternal Word was with God and was God and was in the beginning with God.[[1]](#footnote-1) We remember how the Triune God was the anchor of life in Genesis. God’s presence prevented creation from blowing away. God created life: light and dark, sky and ground, water and air, plants and animals and people. God sustained this life, filtering the bad away from the good, so that life would flourish. God promoted life’s growth and expansion. We remember how God was the root of life in a new creation after the flood, bringing Noah’s family to a fresh start. We remember how God rooted the chosen people to a promised land and sustained them with descendants more numerous than the stars – Abraham and Sarah, Jacob and Leah, Joseph and Miriam and Ruth... We remember how God rooted the Jewish people with kings, particularly with David and Solomon.

When Jesus said here in Revelation, “I am the root and the descendant of David…” he connected himself to the royal line of Israel. Jesus was both the beginning and a sustaining part in the people’s growth. Jesus was and is and will be forever more. The Triune God gave us our beginning, then stayed with us through our growth and troubles. The Triune God brought us through the plagues and pestilence, through civil war and enslavement and exile. God went with us through sin and death and trials of every sort until we are safely in hand at the end, in the new city, forever a part of God’s kingdom.

Revelation is not just a happy ending. It is an invitation to relisten to the biblical story and reinvest in our relationship with the Triune God. These verses invite us to remember how God has upheld us. Remember how God has sustained us. Remember how God has nourished us. And now, “the Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come.’” It’s not too late. Let everyone who hears come. Everyone is invited to quench their thirst. Everyone is invited to the waters of life (which we receive in our baptism). There is one more invitation, one more forgiveness, one more chance to come and know and play with God. *This*, too, is one of the themes in our story with God. However bad or clueless we may have been, God gives us one more chance.

God gave the people one more chance after the Tower of Babel, when they were scattered to the winds to try again. God gave the people one more chance when God carried Noah’s family safely through the flood. God gave the people one more chance when they were freed from slavery in Egypt. Over and over and over again, the people “did what was evil in the sight of the Lord.” They made God mad, then God punished the people. After the people had been punished for awhile, they were always sorry for what they had done. They asked God’s forgiveness, and God relented. All was well. Until a generation passed, and the people forgot God’s covenant. They forgot God’s laws and the history with their ancestors, and they repeated the pattern. Israel sinned and made God mad. God punished the people. The people were sorry and repented. God relented. All was well. So the cycle went over and over and over again through history.

In this, our story is part of the resurrection story. Countless times since the world began, we, the people, messed up. Big time. We’ve gone against God’s laws and teachings so many times. We’ve made God mad. But for every time we made God mad, God has also forgiven us. God has restored us and given us new life, new hope, new possibilities. From Noah to Moses to Jonah’s unwanted destination of Nineveh, we have narrowly escaped the jaws of death by God’s grace (and God’s grace alone).

The *Christian Century* magazine recently published an interview with Civil War General Robert E. Lee’s descendant, Rev. Robert W. Lee.[[2]](#footnote-2) The Rev. Lee is a Cooperative Baptist pastor in North Carolina. He told a story about “a powerful resurrection story” when he was invited to preach at Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta – the church formerly pastored by Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Rev. Lee said that it was a moment of great intensity when he, a “descendent of Robert E. Lee [was] standing in the place where Dr. King preached some of his most important sermons. If that isn’t part of the coming of the kingdom of God, I don’t know what is… that is what the reign of God looks like: someone with an awful past being given a new future.”

This is not the kind of thing that happens to us everyday. New chances and resurrection are uncommon in our world. Only rarely do we read headlines about Rev. Lee and the Ebenezer Baptist Church. Occasionally we hear stories of violent criminals who become peacemakers and inspirational speakers. Or former gang members who become social workers and community organizers. When we hear their stories, we likely make trite comments about their courage or teachers or major life turnaround. What we *should* do is testify to the power of resurrection! Christ is risen. He is risen indeed! See how God has upheld you. Look how God has sustained us and nourished us through your story. These resurrection stories are one example after another of God’s kingdom come.

And now, “the Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come.’” It’s not too late. Let everyone who hears come. Everyone is invited to the waters of life. There is one more invitation, one more forgiveness, one more chance to come and know and play with God. Even more important, one more chance to reflect on the times and stories when God has made resurrection and the kingdom known in your own life. The times when dead ends became intersections, fear became hope, and grief became joy.

In my own life I can name several seasons of resurrection. I remember one particular time when all of the exterior pieces of my life seemed so great to everyone else – I owned my own home, was in great physical shape, worked in a significant congregation and became a respected leader in the community. But I was not happy. All of these good things did not add up to showers of blessings in my personal and spiritual life. One day I literally laid down on the floor, reading the book of Lamentations and weeping with my face against the carpet. The biblical poet’s words were my own that day:

The thought of my affliction is wormwood and gal! My soul continually thinks of it and is bowed down within me. But *this* I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, God’s mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. ‘The Lord is my portion,’ says my soul, therefore I will hope in him.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Trying to reach for God’s unending mercies seems like a fool’s errand on days like that. I certainly didn’t see or feel God’s unending mercies, nor did I experience them afresh and new the next morning (as the Lamenter promised). But praying these words over and over again for a period of days and weeks and months helped me claim new, resurrection life when it did arrive – as fresh and startling as it was for the disciples on Easter morning. I wasn’t expecting it, but one day (Alleluia!) I saw God’s promise of new life and new hope realized. One day I caught a glimpse of God’s kingdom being built around me and for me. It had been there all along, but my own sin and brokenness were blinders that prevented me from claiming the good news.

These verses in Revelation aren’t a fortune tale for when we die. These words are dripping with hope for *every* day when we experience death. These chapters are for people who know hopelessness and fear and anger and grief. This is the happy ending for people who have all but given up. Friends, believe the good news today and every day, for the life of the world and for your own life here and now – Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! The Spirit and the bride say, “Come.” Come and see the kingdom for yourself. Come and sit at the Table in the Kingdom of God. Come and taste the water of life and the bread of heaven. Come and be washed in God’s grace. Amen.

1. John 1:1-2 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Christian Century*. May 7, 2019. pp. “A White, Southern Pastor Takes a Hard Look at the Sin of Racism.” Amy Frykholm interviews Robert W. Lee. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Lamentations 3:19-24 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)